

# Nutrition Guide

## Is your child a picky eater?

### The energetic child who rarely seems hungry

#### *Your child is energetic, but rarely seems hungry – what does this mean?*

Some children who are very active, playful, and curious can be particularly difficult to feed because they rarely seem to feel hungry or display much of an appetite, and they rarely want to sit down to eat. These children, as a result of their active and curious nature, seem more interested in playing and interacting with their caregivers than in food.

In general, these children show very little appetite, fill up quickly, and are easily distracted from eating. Poor appetite and food refusal in these children are usually first noticed during the transition to spoon - and self-feeding - between 6 months and 3 years of age.

#### *What can you do to help your child?*

Overall, it is important to structure your child's meals in ways that stimulate the child's appetite and encourage your child to recognize the feeling of hunger and to learn to eat until fullness.

The following tips should help you achieve this:

- Set up a feeding schedule for your child that includes 3 meals and an afternoon snack every day; the meals and the snack should be 3 to 4 hours apart and take place at the same time every day
- Do not allow unscheduled snacking, "grazing," or drinking milk from the bottle between meals; provide only water between meals – anything else will only decrease your child's appetite
- Always feed your child in a high chair or at a table
- Keep your child in the high chair or at the table for 20 to 30 minutes, even if your child does not eat or eats very little and is finished in just a few minutes; explain that he/she needs to stay there until "Mom's and Dad's tummies are full" – this will help him/her to eat until fullness
- Do not pressure or force your child to eat – it will probably only lead to a power struggle rather than an increase in his/her food intake



*The information provided in this fact sheet is intended to be used as a guide only. Please consult your doctor or dietitian for personalised advice.*



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- If your child does not eat or eats very little at mealtime, do not worry or give in and allow snacks between meals; it is not dangerous for a child to eat only a small amount at a meal and he/she will eat better at the next meal or the next day
- Minimise distractions during meals, such as toys, books, or television

If you apply these principles, over time, your child will start understanding that mealtime is for eating, not playing or running around. As your child stops eating between meals, he/she will begin to recognize when he/she is hungry. If your child stays at the table long enough, he/she will learn to eat until fullness. Your child will model his/her behavior after the behavior of other family members at the table and eat more food.

## *Family matters*

Food is such an important part of family life. Make sure that all family members and caregivers understand why your child does not eat well. Also make sure that they understand and agree on the need to structure your child's meals in ways that stimulate feelings of hunger and appetite. Never coerce or force-feed your child.

## *Importance of nutritional support*

Children with a poor appetite may require nutritional support to reduce their risk of nutrient deficiencies and impaired growth. Your doctor will tell you if you should add a nutritional supplement to your child's diet. By following these guidelines, you have taken the first step to help your child – and your entire family. Over time, by implementing the tips described in this fact sheet, and working with your doctor or other health care providers, you should notice continuing improvement in your child's eating behavior.

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